

NOAA/NMFS SEA TURTLE FACILITY

A Galveston Historic Foundation (GHF)/Galveston Independent School District (GISD)
Family Learning Center



COME VISIT US IN PERSON



OR VISIT US ON THE WEB
<http://galveston.ssp.nmfs.gov/galv>

WHO ARE WE?

We are the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Sea Turtle Facility which is part of the NOAA/NMFS Galveston Laboratory. We are not a public aquarium or a zoo. We are a U.S.



Federal Government (U.S. Dept. of Commerce) Research Facility dedicated to raising threatened and endangered sea turtles in captivity. Guided tours of our Facility are offered to the public 3 days per week. This is the only facility of its kind in the United States and one of only a couple of places in the world where you can see Kemp's ridley hatchlings. The Kemp's ridley sea turtles in our Facility are a gift from the Government of Mexico and are part of a joint international U.S.-Mexico conservation and recovery project. The loggerhead sea turtles are part of a cooperative

conservation program with the State of Florida. We are also a Sea Turtle Rehabilitation Center and Sea Turtle Hospital for the upper Texas coast.

WHAT DO WE DO?

The Galveston Laboratory is known worldwide for its work on captive rearing of sea turtles. All species of sea turtles found in U.S. territorial waters are classified as threatened or endangered and they are all protected by the Endangered Species Act (ESA). We raise sea turtles in captivity as part of National and International Sea Turtle Recovery efforts and programs which are required by the U.S. Endangered Species Act. Approximately 600 sea turtles are raised in our facility each year. Kemp's ridley hatchlings obtained from Mexico and loggerhead hatchlings obtained from Florida are captive-reared for up to two years, used in research, and then released into the Gulf of Mexico. As we are a research facility, research is our primary goal. New tags and tagging methods are developed in the Facility before they are used in the field. Sea turtle growth and feeding studies are ongoing at the Facility. Captive reared sea turtles are used to test experimental fishing gear designed specifically to prevent sea turtles from drowning in fishing trawls.

Since 1978, almost 24,000 Kemp's ridleys and 1,500 loggerheads have been reared, tagged, and released. Tag returns from these releases have been reported from the Gulf of Mexico, the U.S. Atlantic Coast, France, and Morocco. Growth and migration studies of captive-reared turtles indicate that they adapt well to conditions in the wild and are found distributed throughout the natural range of the species. Injured or sick sea turtles found in the wild also are treated and rehabilitated at the laboratory and released back into the wild.

Thousands of people visit our rearing facility each year. Public outreach and education are vital if sea turtle recovery efforts are going to be successful.

WHAT WILL YOU SEE ON YOUR VISIT?

You will see up to 600 live sea turtles housed in our 30 saltwater tanks. There is no glass or fence between you and the sea turtles - You can get face-to-face if you wish as long as you don't touch! Often our Tour Guides will pick up a sea turtle for enhanced viewing and photo



opportunities. Special permits are required to handle sea turtles as they are protected by both Federal and State Laws - We also ask you to refrain from handling the sea turtles as they can deliver a nasty bite. One of our Staff Biologists will lead you on a guided tour of the sea turtle facility. Depending on the time of year you visit - you will see one or more species of sea

turtles. For most of the year we have both Kemp's ridley and loggerhead sea turtles on exhibit. Your Tour Guide will tell you a little about the biology and ecology of sea turtles, the threats to sea turtles, on-going research at the sea turtle facility, and conservation-protection measures being employed to save sea turtles from extinction. Aside from the living exhibits we also have numerous interactive and informative exhibits on sea turtle eggs, sea turtle tags and tagging techniques,





sea turtle skulls and a shell (carapace) that you can touch. We also have two shrimp net and turtle excluder device (TED) exhibits - including a full sized shrimp net fitted with a TED. Tours run about 30 minutes to an hour depending on the size and age make-up of the group. To the left, first grade students are identifying their favorite loggerhead hatchling. Tour information is tailored to suit the audience based on a majority principal - if the audience is comprised mainly of young students - then information provided is geared more to that age group. Our experienced Tour Guides can tailor a tour for students from

pre-kindergarten to post-secondary, scout groups to senior citizen groups. If you or your group has a special request or curriculum topic that you would like our tour to include - just ask one of our guides before the tour and we will try to accommodate your request if possible. Time permitting - we incorporate numerous question and answer opportunities into the tour. Our Tour Guides know much more about sea turtles than can ever be possibly presented in the average tour and we encourage you to tap their knowledge and experience. A full-sized shrimp net complete with turtle excluder device has recently been added to the exhibits you will see on a tour.



WHEN IS THE BEST TIME OF THE YEAR TO VISIT?



There are sea turtles in the Facility year-around. Hatchlings arrive in July/August (Kemp's ridleys) and August/September (loggerheads) and they grow quickly. The best time to visit the Facility to see hatchlings is August through November. The best time to see larger sea turtles is December through May. The Sea Turtle Facility is climate controlled for the sea turtles - Sea turtles like it hot and humid. The Facility is kept at a constant 80 degrees F.

FACILITIES? COST?

Tours to the public are free of charge. Modern handicap accessible restrooms and drinking fountain are on site. Food and drink are not allowed in the Sea Turtle Facility and there are no concession or eating facilities on site. Free parking is available both in our lot and on the street. Bus parking is available on the street.

WHEN ARE THE TOURS?

Monday	No Tours
Tuesday	10am, 11am, 1pm, 2pm
Wednesday	No Tours
Thursday	10am, 11am, 1pm, 2pm
Friday	No Tours
Saturday	10am, 11am, 1pm, 2pm
Sunday	Closed

Groups of less than 8 people are welcome without a reservation at scheduled tours times only. Groups of 8 or more people must call to schedule a tour. Call 409-766-3670 to schedule a tour or for more information.

